Plato's *Republic*

Books VII and VIII:

The Cave and the Cycle of Regimes

The Myth of the Cave

The **Cave** is *largely* just a colorful redescription of the **Sun** and **Divided Line** metaphors:

- The fire burning behind the prisoners is the *Sun*, the artifacts and the people passing behind them are *Things*, and the shadows they cast are *Images;* the inside of the Cave is the *Visible World*. ***{eikasia → pistis}***
- The sun outside the cave is the *Good*, the artifacts and people outside are the *Forms*, and the shadows they cast are *Figures;* the world outside the Cave is the *Intelligible World*. (See Book VI, FN 39.) ***{dianoia → noēsis}***

This is all reasonably straightforward, so long as you understand the Divided Line, which we covered last time. ***(E.g.: 3 classes.)*** This new

1. A freed prisoner will initially resist being shown both the *fire* and the *sun*—his eyes aren't used to the ***brightness***—but once he is able to see them he will despise the "honors, praises, and prizes" the still-bound prisoners reward to those who are talented at identifying *shadows* (515c-516e).

   He will be a "source of laughter" to them, however, and Socrates speculates that those still bound would "kill the man who attempts to release and lead [them] up" to the light. (Cf. Socrates' own death: Plato's *Apology* & *Crito.*)

   Because his eyes are now unused to ***darkness***, he looks "graceless and…quite ridiculous when…he is compelled in *courts* or elsewhere to contest about the shadows of the just…." (517a-e) Socrates notes that the two kinds of seeing problems—being unused to *brightness* and being unused to *darkness*—are qualitatively different, however: ***the former must be overcome to attain* enlightenment, *the latter overcome to achieve* (real) political efficacy*.***

2. Socrates uses the metaphor of "**turning** towards the light"↓ to describe the power that leads to enlightenment and says that "this power is in the soul of *each*" (518c; cf. 527e). How does *this* tally with his claim at 491b that "such natures [i.e., those fit to be "perfect philosophers"] are few and born only rarely among human beings"? Perhaps Socrates believes that this power, though present in each, can be developed only to ***different degrees*** by those with different natures (e.g., see 519c-d)—but this is something to think about.
3. Socrates says that philosophers must be *compelled* to "go down again among those prisoners and share their labors and honors" (519d-e). Echoing his claims at 420b, he says that the philosopher's *obligation* to harmonize the citizens "by persuasion and compulsion" is an ***enforceable*** one: the *polis*, after all, produces such men "not in order to let them ***turn*** *whichever way each wants*, but in order that it may use them in binding the city together" (520a). Although Socrates here emphasizes *their obligation to the city* (based upon the care and education the city has provided—cf. the speech of

Philosopher King Education

Socrates now describes (for the last time) the *paideia* of the philosopher kings, which builds upon the earlier description in Books II and III. Briefly, the education is to have *five stages:*

1. *Gymnastics* and *Music* (in one's youth) (521e-)
2. *Math and Science* (in one's 20's) (522c-)
   a. Number and calculation (522c-)
   b. Plane geometry (526d-)
   c. Solid geometry (528b-)
   d. Astronomy (527d-)
   e. Harmonics (530d-)
3. *Dialectic* (in one's early 30's: five years) (532a-)
4. *Polis management* (in one's late 30's and 40's: fifteen years) (540a; 540b↓)
5. *Retirement* (50+: philosopher, advisor, elder

- The purpose of this *educational odyssey* is to redirect the thought of the proto-PK away from the *visible* realm towards the *intelligible* realm, where he will discern the Form of the *kallipolis* (first mentioned at 527c), thus gaining knowledge relevant for governing the polis.
- Each stage of this odyssey is a *screening mechanism*, incidentally: those failing to make the cut are presumably given supporting roles, made soldiers, or left producers.
- The *dialectic*, Socrates notes, aims at "destroying the hypotheses" that undergird mathematics and science and replacing them with a *direct* knowledge of the Good, from which everything else can be deduced (533d-534b; cf. 511b-c).
- Socrates *seems* to indicate that *he* has achieved this enlightenment, though the reference is somewhat ambiguous (see 533a).

Misuse of Dialectic (cf. Book I)

- In a fascinating passage, Socrates criticizes the teaching of dialectic to the young: “imitating those men by whom they are refuted, they themselves refute others, like puppies enjoying pulling and tearing with argument at those who happen to be near.... [T]hey [then] fall quickly into a *profound disbelief* of what they formerly believed. And as a result of this…they themselves and the whole activity of philosophy become the objects of slander among the rest of men....” (537e-539e)
- Socrates goes on to argue that “those with whom one shares arguments are to have *orderly and stable natures*, not as is done nowadays in sharing them with *whoever chances by* and comes to it without being suited to it.”
- *Who is Socrates talking about here?* Plato seems to be *using Socrates to criticize Socrates*, for everything that is described here (teaching to young people, like Alcibiades, who become skeptical and politically dangerous and bring philosophy into disrepute;

Mass Expulsion before Reform

- At 541a, we finally learn what Socrates had in mind at 501a when he said that the philosopher kings must “wipe clean…the city and the dispositions of human beings” as a prelude to polis reform: *all people over the age of ten (except the PKs) are to be expelled from the polis.*
- This manner of jump-starting polis reform is necessary because adults and older children are unreformed and unreformable, and their corrupt “dispositions” will lead the younger children astray and thereby frustrate the reforms of the PKs. ***{Also: anchor Myth of Metals.}***
- As much as we might like to think of the *kallipolis* as a *mere* mental experiment or a bridge to the idea of justice *in the person*, Plato does seem to be determined to keep adding controversial features to it, which he assures us are “hard [to

The Cycle of Regimes (cf. 445d)

- Fortunately, the *Cycle of Regimes* in Book VIII has a very simple structure: for each of the *four corrupt regime types*, Socrates describes its origin (from a transformation of the *previous* regime type) and makeup; he then describes the associated *character type* and its origin, usually through a "father-son" story. ***[city/soul]***
- The ending of the *final* stage—describing the *tyrant*—is postponed until Book IX, where the *Full Theory of the Good* (which completes the *Formal or Political Theory of the Good* in Book IV [see Nussbaum's *Fragility*]) is also presented.
- **Preview full cycle graphically.**

Timarchy (Cretan or Spartan Regime)

- This regime is caused by a *failure of eugenics* in the *kallipolis* ("nuptial number," etc. [546a-d]), resulting in the birth of "unmusical" children and engendering "unlikeness and inharmonious irregularity" (547a).
- The city now becomes *two instead of one*, a kind of mean between the *kallipolis* and oligarchy: an ***honor-loving*** warrior class with private land and homes rules over an enslaved citizenry, held as serfs and domestics (547c).
- Among these warriors, *gymnastic* is honored more than music, and *success in war* is the measure of worth, though *money-hoarding* is pursued in secret (548a-c, 549b).
- The emergence of the man corresponding to this regime is told through the following father-son tale: his father is an easygoing, retiring type in a decaying *kallipolis*, putting up with dishonor and lawsuits for the sake of peace, and the embarrassment of having such a father (combined

Oligarchy

- This regime type, where the ***necessary desire of wealth accumulation*** is pursued to the *exclusion* of virtue, appears when the clandestine accumulation of wealth pursued in the timarchy breaks out into the open.
- The result is a regime founded on property assessment, where *the rich rule the poor* (550d). In such a regime, beggars, thieves, and the like first emerge (552d).
- As for the man corresponding to this regime, his emergence is told through the following father-son tale: a son watches his timarchic father and his secret stash destroyed through political intrigue and resolves to devote his life instead to the quiet pursuit of wealth. (553a-) As noted above, oligarchic man pursues only the *necessary* desire of wealth

Democracy

- This regime, where ***both unnecessary and necessary desires*** (defined crudely at 558d-559d, but fully in Book IX) are pursued equally, emerges when the poor revolt against the rich (557a). As Socrates says, where wealth is honored, moderation cannot be maintained (555d).
- In this regime, *the poor rule*, and offices are filled by *lot* as opposed to election. Socrates' descriptions of the democratic regime (e.g., Athens) are priceless:
  - it is a "city full of freedom and free speech" and "the fairest of all regimes ['to boys and women'], just like a *many-colored cloak decorated in all hues";*
  - it dispenses "a certain equality to equals and unequals alike"; &
  - in it, anarchy is "planted in the very **beasts**," as "horses and asses...have gotten the habit of making their way

- As for nascent democratic man, his story goes as follows: the son, repelled by his stingy and narrow oligarchic father, pursues *unnecessary pleasures:* he "tastes the drones' honey, and has intercourse with fiery, clever beasts who are able to purvey manifold and subtle pleasures with every sort of variety."
- His lack of education prevents him from *mastering* such desires, though as he ages he finally learns to treat his desires in an evenhanded way, *choosing them by "lot,"* as it were, discriminating against none of them, be they necessary *or* unnecessary. (559d-561b)
- The description of democratic man at 561c-e brings *Pericles' Funeral Oration* to mind for Allan Bloom: praise of variety, pluralism, experimentation, etc. *(Ironically, central*

Tyranny

- This regime, in which ***unnecessary desires are pursued exclusively***, emerges when the poor, greedy for the money of the rich, empower *demagogues* who engage in land and wealth redistribution and forgive debts (566e).
- These demagogues slowly evolve into *tyrants*: they initiate wars to distract the people, they orchestrate purges against enemies and former friends, and they surround themselves with a Praetorian guard of emancipated slaves (566e-568a).
- As Socrates notes, “the people in fleeing the smoke of enslavement to free men would have fallen into the fire of being under the *mastery of slaves;* in the place of that great and unseasonable freedom they have put on the dress of the harshest and bitterest enslavement to slaves” (569c).
- The father-son story and the description of the tyrant